

Kendrick Park

Recreation Subcommittee Recommendations

Introduction

Recreational activities will likely be a prime use of Kendrick Park by Amherst's residents and visitors. Our subcommittee considered the concept of "recreation" broadly as we discussed types of development that could enhance these uses of the park.

General suggestions

- This is an urban park and the subcommittee feels it should be developed as such. There are other quiet, green spaces in town, even in downtown, and therefore Kendrick Park can be used for more than that.
- The park's current largely abandoned and deserted state has the potential to decrease the safety of the nearby neighborhoods, and reduce their desirability as places to live. On the other hand, an attractive well-designed urban space within walking distance would clearly enhance these neighborhoods and beautifully complement our new, more vibrant downtown.
- The park should not be overbuilt; rather, there should be a limited number of additional facilities added, spaced and situated so as to keep the park from seeming overly busy. The ambience should be welcoming to all members of the community.
- Any development should be designed to be a draw to the area, both for the neighbors and other town residents, but ideally for visitors from other towns as well.
- Insofar as possible, features should be amenable to multiple rather than limited uses, and appeal to a number of demographic groups in town- e.g., young and old, or groups and individuals.
- We would expect the overall plan created for the park to be implemented in stages over time, giving people opportunity to assess the plan's impact and make changes if necessary.
- Suggested changes to the park would likely increase its use from a few tens of people per day to perhaps a few hundreds. We would of course not propose any type of development which would draw thousands of people to the park daily.
- There are many examples of additions to our town and others which have become eyesores, unused, and even dangerous because budgets for maintenance or improvement costs were easy places to cut as money became tight. As consideration is given to any plan for Kendrick Park, the subcommittee strongly feels that maintenance be considered an integral part of the plan and its budgeting, and not left as an afterthought.

Specific recommendations

The subcommittee created a list of nearly two dozen possible features or activities which could be developed in the Park. We incorporated into this list the extensive compilation of suggestions from town residents, collected through various means: public hearings, email, newspaper ads soliciting input, and a gathering for teens generously hosted by Bertucci's across the street from the Park. We then individually prioritized the suggestions by overall desirability and by their

relative advantage/disadvantage for various demographic groups, and compiled the items that seemed consistently to come out on top. These ideas stood out:

1. **Bathrooms.** Not a recreational activity per se, but there are no public restroom facilities anywhere in downtown. Many- perhaps most- of the people likely to make use of the developed park (parents with toddlers, people spending time eating lunch and reading or throwing a frisbee, seniors walking the paths or taking in the ambience, listeners at a performance) might desperately need such facilities. The nearby restaurants should not be burdened with this. Reasonably inoffensive restroom facilities are found in urban parks around the world, and we should be able to provide them here as well. If impossible, the town should seriously consider public restrooms elsewhere downtown.
2. **Playground.** The request for a place in town for kids to play was overwhelmingly the most frequent suggestion we heard, and a few bumps or knolls to run up and down are not adequate for long. The subcommittee is not in favor of traditional metal or wooden structures; however, a number of companies exist to create “natural playgrounds” which are more suited to Kendrick Park. These are sustainable, environmentally friendly, aesthetically pleasing, and sensitive to the landscape in which they placed. They are welcoming and fun. Pictures of such playgrounds are included at the end of this report. Such a playground should be enclosed in some way (e.g., a tasteful, low wrought iron fence or stone wall) to provide safety for small children and a sense of security for their caregivers, and include seating spaces in and/or around for parents and visitors.
3. **Well-designed walking paths.** These should exist around and likely through the park as well. It should be possible to circumnavigate the park without needing to cross the street. These paths would be used by everyone from parents with strollers to older walkers and the disabled, and so should be constructed of a material which is friendly to all these users.
4. **Open field.** Part of the park should be kept for free-form activities such as throwing a frisbee or baseball, or laying out a picnic blanket or performing Tai Chi. Other spaces exist in town for these activities also, so this does not need to be a primary recreational purpose of Kendrick Park, only as a seasonal alternative to other recreational activities, such as:
5. **Ice skating rink.** Keeping in mind the desire to be efficient and create spaces which are multi-use, we envision this as overlapping open field space, or perhaps the performance space in some manner. Though a good quality ice rink may be difficult to maintain, winter is long and skating rinks are social and community-building. Everyone can benefit from being outside more of the year. Perhaps a good solution is a small sized rink that is easier to maintain.
6. **Performing arts space.** This perhaps would take the form of a bandshell of some sort, with seating in a natural amphitheater. A picture of such an amphitheater is attached. While only useful part of the year, there are many performing groups in town which could benefit from availability of such a space. Of course we do not envision blockbuster concerts drawing thousands of attendees, but smaller scale shows suited to outdoor presentation. Shakespeare in the park, poetry readings, a jazz group, and a return of “Hot Summer Nights” are examples which have been suggested by town residents.
7. **Carousel.** This recommendation won the hearts of even the most skeptical subcommittee members as it was discussed and debated. A carousel would be a real draw to the north end of the downtown area; it is interesting and enjoyable to individuals from young children and their parents, to school children or dating couples, to older residents who might like to watch

and listen and reminisce. Carousels are common to many small urban parks worldwide, do not need to take up much space, are available to be refurbished, and could be made to be quite Amherst- and Pioneer Valley-specific (for instance, a “very hungry caterpillar” created to replace a broken horse). Issues of construction, upkeep, and staffing are significant but should be addressable.

Other smaller features might be added as the design of the park progresses. These might include space for classic games such as bocce (a sport exploding in popularity); chess tables; or slate for hopscotch or chalk drawing. None of these take up much space and could be placed in or near other defined areas of the park.

Additionally, sufficient lighting would be required for safety and security in the park. The recreation subcommittee would highly recommend that any electrical addition to the park be laid underground.

Other suggestions did not make the final cut for various reasons. Listed are a few of these:

1. A water spray park would be an asset to Amherst but probably belongs elsewhere (e.g., replacing the wading pool at Groff Park, or sited at the War Memorial Pool complex).
2. A skateboard plaza would provide a safe, sanctioned area for an athletic activity popular among an extraordinarily under-served demographic, but there is no good mechanism to provide the public education necessary to convince townspeople that such a facility can be relatively small, attractive, multi-use, and an incredibly positive asset to the town, or to dispel the widely-held but mistaken and disproven notion that such a facility is crime-ridden, dangerous, ugly, and fosters undesirable activities.
3. Courts for sports such as basketball or volleyball/badminton would appeal to a younger population, but did not seem to suit the overall ambience of Kendrick Park. It is noted that not much (other than an open field) is included to appeal to older children and teens.

Finally, it is recognized that certain of the rejected ideas (or indeed other ideas) may come to be seen as more in keeping with the overall design concept for the park as it develops. That said, the basic principles formulated in the first section above seem important to keep in mind, and the subcommittee would emphasize the desirability of fashioning facilities that are useful and draw people to the park.



Chelsea Flower Show, England



From Portfolio, Natural Playgrounds Co., Concord, NH



Copenhagen, Denmark



Scott Arboretum amphitheater, Swarthmore College